

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE SERVICE INDUSTRY IN JAPAN AND CHINA

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, Japan's tourism industry has been affected by a rapid increase in visitors from China. This surge in Chinese travelers is mainly due to the depreciation of the yen, which has reduced the prices of flights and goods; in addition, the traditional Japanese approach to hospitality, known as ometenashi, has always been admired by the Chinese. However, most previous studies in this field have addressed the experiences and evaluation of Chinese tourists visiting Japan for the first time. The current study provides a new perspective on service delivery: that of the service provider. The aim of this study was to explore the provision of good service content in Japan from the perspective of the service provider, specifically Chinese who have worked in Japan's service industry with experience of working in Japan's service industry. These respondents were familiar with the actual processes of service delivery in both Japan(as providers) and China(as customers/service recipients). To examine the perceptions of this important group, we conducted a questionnaire survey targeting Chinese students with experience of working in the Japanese service industry. The responses were discussed and analyzed, offering comparative insights into the quality of service provision in Japan and China.

KEYWORDS: Hospitality, Ometenashi, Provider Perspective & Paired t-Test

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INTRODUCTION

Background

In recent years, Japan's travel and tourism industry has been affected by a rapid increase in visitors from China. The number of Chinese visitors to Japan reached an estimated 4.99 million in 2015, double that in 2014 [1]. This growth is due partly to the relaxation of tourist visa requirements for Chinese visitors, and partly to the depreciation of the yen and the increasing availability of cheap and convenient flights and cheap, high-quality goods. It has also been noted that the traditional Japanese approach to hospitality, known as ometenashi, is attracting increasing attention [2], especially in the form of the tea ceremony. Ometenashi is generally translated in English as "Japanese hospitality." However, the concept of ometenashi differs from the Western concept of hospitality [3].

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the highly competitive service industry, the provision of high-quality services is one of the most important prerequisites for gaining a sustainable competitive advantage in the marketplace. Consequently, service managers and academic researchers alike have sought to understand how customers perceive the quality of service [4]. When asked to assess the attractiveness of services provided in Japan, Chinese respondents in a number of

surveys and other studies have positively evaluated the tourist facilities and other services provided at tourist destinations; accommodation services and clerk services; and hospitality and ometenashi [5]. Ometenashi is the traditional Japanese approach to hospitality, defined as seeking to please a guest through the utmost attentiveness to his or her needs, purpose and status, whether direct or indirect [6]. In the context of service management in Japan, hospitality is based on one's courtesy and manner. Ometenashi also signifies a striving toward "perfection." It should be noted that the tradition is predicated on a unconscious common understanding between host and guest [7]. Yet previous researchers in this field have investigated only the experiences and perceptions of Chinese visitors. In addition, most of their Chinese survey respondents were first-time visitors to Japan. Yoo and Park (2007) found that employees in the service industry (service providers), as an integral part of the service process, play a critical role in enhancing perceived service quality [8]. To find ways of providing better service, it is essential to assess service content from the perspective of the service provider. The current study investigated the experiences and perceptions of Chinese respondents who had both received services in China (as customers) and worked in Japan's service industry (as service providers). The findings of our analysis yield comparative insights into actual service provision in Japan and China.

PURPOSE

As the respondents were Chinese people with experience of working in Japan's service industry, they were familiar with the real-life processes of service provision in both Japan (as providers) and China (as customers). Compared with Chinese people visiting Japan for the first time, they were thus expected to offer clearer insights into the significant differences in service provision between Japan and China (Figure 1). The aim of this study was to explore the provision of good service content in Japan from the perspective of the service provider, specifically Chinese who have worked in Japan's service industry. We first administered a questionnaire survey to Chinese respondents (Chinese students in Japan) who were working or had previously worked in Japan's service industry. The results are discussed and analyzed here, enabling comparison of service provision between Japan and China.

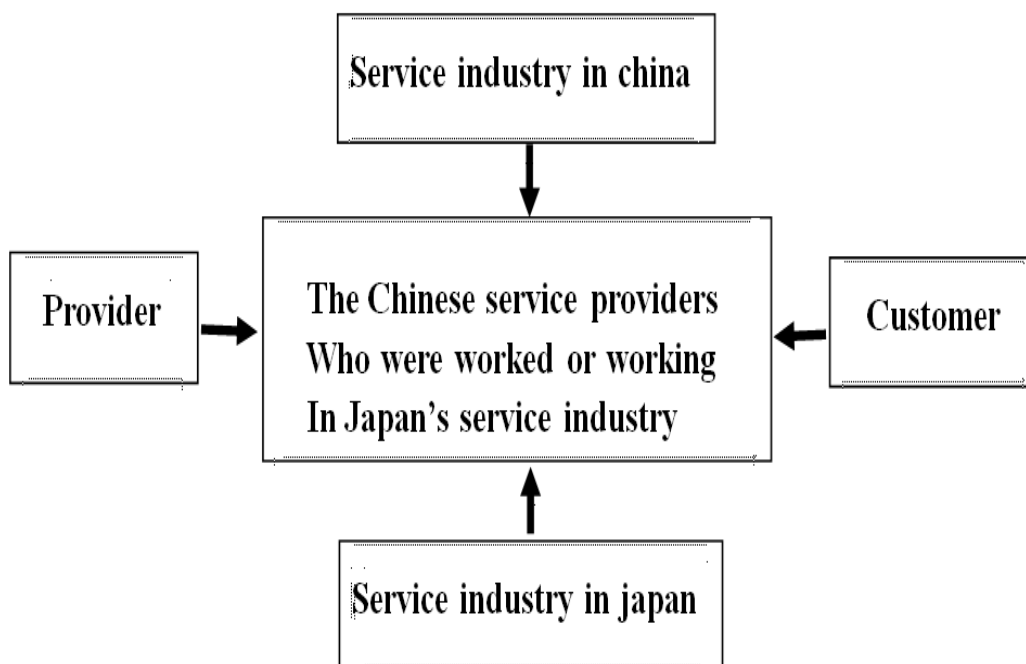


Figure 1: The Proposed Theoretical Framework

HYPOTHESIS

Prior to performing the analysis, we constructed hypotheses based on the findings of previous studies of the perceptions of visitors to Japan [9-12]. The reasons for each hypothesis are given below. Our results supported the hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Japan's service environment and hygiene are better than those of China.

In densely populated areas of China, it is been reported that places providing services are dirty or otherwise lack good hygiene. In contrast, Japan has a good reputation for hygiene.

Hypothesis 2: Employees in Japan's service industry display a better attitude and greater courtesy than their counterparts in China.

According to a common saying in China, only someone with no knowledge will work in the service industry. To maintain their pride, Chinese employees often have a bad attitude and lack courtesy when providing services. In contrast, the traditional Japanese approach to hospitality, *omotenashi*, stresses the need for a good employee attitude and courteous behavior.

Hypothesis 3: Compared with their counterparts in China, employees in Japan's service industry have a better "way or manner" of providing services and are thus more efficacious.

It has been noted that Chinese employees in the service industry lack training and behave badly. Japanese service employees have been found to respond more swiftly and flexibly to unexpected situations and thus to provide more effective services.

For each hypothesis, a paired t-test was performed to determine the relationship between the items in question.

METHODS

Summary of Questionnaire Survey

Data were collected from 115 Chinese respondents (some students) working part-time in Japan's service industry. The data were collected between June 1, 2016 and June 30, 2016. Questionnaires were distributed via China's largest Web-based SNS and WeChat. Those responsible for the primary data collection bear no responsibility for the analysis and interpretations presented herein. The questionnaire comprised 56 items and covered income, educational background, duration of stay in Japan, work experience in the service industry, and perceptions of the relative quality of service provision in Japan and China. The responses to each item were given on a five-point scale ranging from 1) very good to 5) very bad, i.e. 1) very good, 2) good, 3) ordinary, 4) bad and 5) very bad.

Basic-Attributes Analysis

The basic attributes of the survey respondents are shown in Table 1. The sample was composed of 47 males (40.5%) and 69 females (59.5%). Therefore, females accounted for almost 60% of the Chinese respondents working in Japan's service industry. Only one person was younger than 25; 25-45 year olds made up 69% of the sample. Respondents older than 46 accounted for 40%. Therefore, the overwhelming majority of the respondents (90%) working in Japan's service industry were older than 25. The item measuring duration of stay in Japan revealed that 45 of the respondents had been in Japan for 1-5 years (39%). Approximately 42 of the respondents had been in Japan for 5-10 years (36%). Clearly,

therefore, the majority of the Chinese people surveyed had lived in Japan for more than 1 year. In terms of educational background, 60% of the respondents had attended either junior college or university, and 15(13%) had received graduate education.

T-Test Analysis Result

Paired-sample t-tests were conducted to compare the perceived quality of service content in Japan and China. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 2. There was a significant difference in hygiene level between the two service industries: $M = 2.431$, $t = 23.045$, $p = .000$ ($p < 0.001$). The service environment and hygiene in Japan's service industry were rated higher than those in China's service industry. There was also a significant difference in service employees' attitude and courtesy between Japan and China: $M = 2.172$, $t = 20.315$, $p = .000$ ($p < 0.001$). This suggests that hospitality in Japan's service industry is better than that

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

Content	Subject	Questionnaire Answerers	Rate
Gender	Male	47	40.5%
	Female	69	59.5%
Age	$18 \leq \text{age} < 25$	1	0.9%
	$25 \leq \text{age} < 35$	34	29.3%
	$36 \leq \text{age} < 45$	35	30.2%
	$46 \leq \text{age} < 55$	27	23.3%
	$55 \leq \text{age}$	19	16.4%
Length of stay in japan	$1 \leq \text{year}$	13	11.2%
	$1 \leq \text{year} < 5$	45	38.8%
	$5 \leq \text{year} < 10$	42	36.2%
	$10 \leq \text{year} < 15$	6	5.2%
	$15 \leq \text{year}$	10	8.6%
Educational background	High School or below	6	5.2%
	trade school	4	3.4%
	Junior college	32	27.6%
	University	59	50.9%
	Master or above	15	12.9%

In China. In addition, employees' way or manner of providing service was found to differ significantly between Japan and China's service industries: $M = 2.000$, $t = 18.149$, $p = .000$ ($p < 0.001$). The behavior of Japan's employees was rated more positively than that of China's. The extent to which service employee's smile was also perceived to differ significantly between Japan and China: $M = 1.845$, $t = 15.329$, $p = .000$ ($p < 0.001$). The responses suggest that China's service employees smile less than those in Japan. Another significant difference between Japan and China was found in restaurant atmosphere: $M = 1.871$, $t = 17.025$, $p = .000$ ($p < 0.001$). The atmosphere of restaurants in Japan was rated higher than the atmosphere of Chinese restaurants. The effectiveness of employees' methods of providing services was also perceived to differ between Japan and China ($M = 1.931$, $t = 17.340$, $p = .000$ ($p < 0.001$)), with Japan's employees considered more effective. Finally, a significant difference in service level was reported between Japan and China: $M = 2.138$, $t = 20.885$, $p = .000$ ($p < 0.001$). Japan's overall service level was more positively evaluated than that of China.

Table 2: T-Test Result

	Paired Differences					T	DF	Sig.(2Tailed)
	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	95% CI of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Hygiene issues between Japan and China.	2.431	1.136	.105	2.222	2.640	23.045	115	.000
employees' attitude and courtesy	2.172	1.152	.107	1.961	2.384	20.315	115	.000
employees' way or manner of providing service	2.000	1.187	.110	1.782	2.218	18.149	115	.000
employees' smile	1.845	1.296	.120	1.606	2.083	15.329	115	.000
atmosphere of restaurant	1.871	1.183	.110	1.653	2.088	17.025	115	.000
corresponding method	1.931	1.199	.111	1.710	2.152	17.340	115	.000
service level	2.138	1.103	.102	1.935	2.341	20.885	115	.000

DISCUSSIONS

Environment and Hygiene

The environment and hygiene in Japan's service industry received a higher evaluation than those in China's service industry, with a difference of 2.431 between the mean values. This result was consistent with Hypothesis 1. Hygiene is a key element of the services cape, which plays a very important role in the formation of customers' first impressions. In China, issues such as spitting on the ground, littering, and a lack of waste sorting were reported, along with dirty floors and a lack of toilet hygiene in supermarkets and restaurants. Especially in densely populated areas of China, staff usually only clean twice a day: in the morning and in the evening. In contrast, the staff in Japan's supermarkets and restaurants clean floors, bathrooms and other areas for two or three hours at a time, and if any area is found not to be clean, it is cleaned at once. This hygienic environment increases the quality of service content in Japan. To solve China's problems with hygiene, the orientation of China's service industry should be shifted from financial gain to customer satisfaction, as the needs of customers in the service industry cannot be ignored. As hygiene is a key element of the services cape, managers and employees should be made aware of the need to ensure good hygiene and equipped with the methods and resources to do so.

Attitude and Courtesy

The item measuring employees' attitude and courtesy and the item measuring the extent to which employees smiled revealed significant differences between Japan and China (differences between mean values = 2.172 and 1.845, respectively). The attitude and courtesy of Japan's service employees were more positively evaluated than those of China's service employees, and the former were also reported to smile more. These findings were consistent with Hypothesis 2. Employees' attitude, courtesy and friendliness (displayed through smiling) play both technical and social roles in the service system. Employees' service attitude is positively correlated with customers' willingness to return [11]. Employees' attitude and courtesy and the extent to which they smile are positively correlated with their attitudinal and emotional suitability for a role in the human service industry, i.e. their understanding of and capacity to deliver hospitality. Prior research has shown that China's service employees are less conscious of the importance of hospitality than those in Japan [14]; indeed, Japan has a culture of hospitality or *omotenashi*. However, Japanese *omotenashi* is based on a non-dominant relationship between equals – between the person offering the service (the host) and the person receiving it (the guest or

customer). In studies of marketing, *omotenashi* has been treated as equivalent to consumer satisfaction. In terms of culture, while Japan has *omotenashi*, China has Confucianism. Confucian culture has a practical significance in modern society in three dimensions: moral, educational and political. The moral values of Confucianism can be applied to the service industry.

Corresponding and Employees' Way or Manner

Service employees' way or manner of providing services and corresponding efficacy were found to differ between Japan and China (differences between mean values = 2.000 and 1.931, respectively). Japan's employees' way or manner of providing services and corresponding efficacy were both evaluated more positively than those of China's employees. These findings were consistent with Hypothesis 3. Employees' approach to and efficacy of service provision play technical and social roles in the service system. Heskett (1986) proposed four related elements of a strategic service vision: job and employee satisfaction; employee loyalty; quality of service; and productivity. These factors reinforce each other in a "virtuous cycle"; that is, satisfied employees are more likely to provide a good service, increasing the probability of customer satisfaction [15]. To provide a good service and thereby ensure that customers are satisfied, it is important to provide employees with technical training and appropriate financial remuneration [16]. The findings of this study indicate that Japan's employment services(ES) are better than that of China, and that China's service industry should improve its service content and delivery by emphasizing ES and the development of human resources(to enhance employees' way or manner of providing services and corresponding efficacy).

CONCLUSIONS

In any system for providing services, the customer's side and the provider's side are integrated and influence each other. To provide better service, it is essential to ensure excellent service quality from the service provider's side. However, no research has been conducted to date on the provider's perspective on Japan's excellent service content. The current study fills this gap, verifying the excellent quality of service content in Japan. The respondents—Chinese service providers with experience of working in Japan's service industry—were familiar with the actual provision of services in both Japan (as service providers) and China(as customers/service recipients). The responses of the Chinese service providers verified the excellent quality of service content in Japan, with seven key items empirically identified: hygiene; employees' attitude and courtesy; hospitality; employees' friendliness(smiling); atmosphere of restaurant; employees' manner and corresponding efficacy of service provision; and overall service level. Japan's service industry received higher ratings for all of these items than China's service industry. The results also offered insights into deficiencies in China's service industry. To improve the service industry in China, it is important to resolve problems with hygiene, employees' attitude, courtesy, hospitality and friendliness, restaurant atmosphere, manner of service provision and corresponding efficacy, and overall service level. It is critical to raise awareness of these issues and to advance the development of human resources in China's service industry. A specific problem-solving strategy is required to address each area of weakness.

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